

THE 2014 VOICE AWARDS By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



This year, the Voice Awards, a collaborative effort by SAMSHA, public and private partners, LACDMH and members of the entertainment community, along with policymakers and persons who live and thrive with mental and/or substance use disorders, held their 9th annual ceremony at Royce Hall on the UCLA campus.

UCLA was a fitting place for the event, given the recent damage caused by the flooding of the campus on August 13th. This year, the awards came at the same time as the tragic loss of Robin Williams. We shared our grief and loss, not only for Robin, but for Philip Seymour Hoffman and for all those others whose psychological suffering we will never know because we will never see them. Sadly, too many of those lost are young adults.

These losses hit homes all across America, day after day, and few will ever get the same level of attention as when a celebrity loses the battle.

Still, recovery is always at the heart of the awards. So, we gathered together to celebrate and mourn at the same time; together in one place without discrimination. It was powerful. The focus of the event was on how to increase awareness and education about co-occurring disorders, and how to reach out for help and help those afflicted. Despite how far we have come in battling stigma or in finding new ways to foster prevention and treatment, the sad fact remains that in the war against suicide, there will always be some casualties. Not because we didn't try, not because we didn't learn or didn't teach or didn't care, but because we didn't know in time. In life, timing is everything and each voice silenced is a scream that we need to hear. That is why events like the Voice Awards are so important because they give us hope and encouragement in the middle of the battlefield as we are wounded but still walking.

For many, the battle for peace of mind is never ending and the Voice Awards offers us everyday success stories about the people that live in the small towns and in big cities. We must continue to support the efforts of those with power and influence to continue to enlighten us about these important issues with thoughtful productions, such as films like *Short Term 12*, *Home: _____*, *The Spectacular Now*, and *Frankie and Alice* among others. Documentaries such as *The Anonymous People* and *Life Continued* bring real life perspectives into our view, while mainstream television offers us some spotlights, such as *Mike and Molly* and *MOM*, which deal with real-life issues that may have been hidden in the silence between the pain and shame.

The Voice Awards film clips moved us, the speeches inspired us and the losses reminded us that we have come so far but that we must go on and on, looking for better answers and more effective solutions.

The valiant people who shared their personal experiences had the most to contribute for theirs are the stories about whom scripts can only be imagined; they who have lived the stories and survived to tell them. People like Toni Jordan and Greg Dicharry remind us that there is life, love and meaning well past any diagnosis. Peer advocates like Jean Campbell whose perspective has been invaluable to national attention on mental health issues, and Kristen Johnston whose battles with drugs and alcohol have led her to become a leader in creating safer spaces for youth. These and so many other non-celebrated people who have committed themselves to helping others lead better lives.

If you have never attended the Voice Awards, it is one of the best things in life that are free. Hope to see you there next year!